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VOLUME VIII SPRING 1954 NUMBER 3

CONTENTS

Some Notes on the Teaching of Literature	*B. Pattison*	75
Spoken English in the Gold Coast	*P. Strevens*	81
English Teaching in Schleswig-Holstein	*P. Gurrey*	90
Conversation Groups	*H. A. Cartledge*	98
THE QUESTION BOX		102
BOOK REVIEWS		105
OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED		110

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Some Notes *on the* Teaching *of* Literature

BRUCE PATTISON

LITERATURE is read for pleasure. The term 'pleasure' is very inadequate: we hesitate to describe our feelings on seeing a tragedy as pleasure; but a more satisfactory term is hard to find, and 'pleasure' does well enough, if we take it in contrast to practical advantage. The medium of literature is a language, and a language serves practical purposes for the most part. The only advantage we can get from a poem or a novel is emotional satisfaction—and perhaps enlightenment about some aspects of life and about the author's mind. Any purpose served will be inside ourselves. If a work is found tedious, very little benefit can be gained from it. When we are in a position to choose literature for our pupils (who do not know the full range of what is available), then we need not forgo the teacher's urge to improve their taste, but we should certainly not bore them for their own good. We shall have to justify our choice by making it interesting, however unpromising it seems to them at the outset. That, after all, is what we are for: they can suffer drudgery for themselves, to get through examinations perhaps. There is no harm in their having to cope with difficulties, provided they do not become discouraged. However, enjoying literature is not the same as enjoying puzzle-solving. Nor is it a means of learning a language. The use of a language in literature is generally rather different from its use elsewhere. Talking like a book is not very successful in ordinary life and talking like a poem or a novel is apt to sound particularly strange. Unless the greater part of the language employed has been met before in other contexts, no literary effect can be produced in the reader. The attention should be on the artistic and imaginative qualities of the literature, of which the language is only a medium, and we should be so occupied with those qualities as to be unconscious of the medium. This is much more difficult in a foreign language than in the mother-tongue, but the more it can be achieved the greater the pleasure to be derived from the literature as such. Linguistic details need not be neglected, but they should unobtrusively serve understanding of the literary effects the author aimed at. To hack a work into linguistic details is to destroy it.

To enjoyment we can add understanding as one of the aims of our teaching. We should be able to help our pupils see more of the significance of a work they already enjoy, and pleasure should

increase as more of the artistry becomes apparent. Because of the medium of literature, its significance can never be purely aesthetic: it has relations to experience in other phases of life, and understanding these is important for the appreciation of the work itself. Perhaps one of the chief values of a foreign literature is that it brings us new experience of life in a different society and tradition. Literature should never be used as sociological material, but its social and cultural assumptions have to be shared for proper understanding.

If we are planning a course of teaching in any literature, then training our students to go on after the course ends is a legitimate aim. This is less important when the student already has considerable experience as a reader of literature in his own language. Nevertheless there are kinds of literature and conventions peculiar to most languages, and we may be able to help a student get used to them. When he has grasped one Elizabethan play he can more easily cope with another.

This last aim, of training students, suggests a working principle by which we can judge the value of our own teaching. It is that we should never do anything our pupils can do for themselves. Some works can be left entirely to them. We may find it necessary to check whether the works have been read, or if any part of them has proved obscure, but that is testing, not teaching. When we set out to teach we must be sure that from each lesson the students get something they could not get otherwise. It may only be a good reading aloud of the work. With poetry, which relies to a large extent on sound effects, that may be an extremely important contribution to understanding and enjoyment. Each lesson should bring the literary work alive in a way that is possible only in a group, or with the assistance of a more experienced reader—that is, with the teacher's assistance.

If a work is likely to be difficult, if our pupils have to be helped to approach and grasp it, there arises the problem of presentation. First impressions are extremely important. Interest has to be created, and our pupils have to be led to a point from which they can study the work more closely. It is always advisable to let them see the whole work as quickly as possible. A literary work is a unity. If we tear a chapter out of a history book, the rest of the book is still capable of serving its purpose as a source of information; but to blot out any part of a work of art is to alter the proportions of the whole, or even to destroy its meaning. The details must be seen in relation to the whole: otherwise we murder to dissect. A total impression should be gained at the outset; the subsequent examination of detail must keep the whole in mind continually;

and finally we should be left with a total impression, fuller and more precisely defined than our first impression, because of the intervening examination of the work in detail.

The first impression of the whole will inevitably come from reading it right through. A long work, of course, cannot be read right through at a sitting. It has to be divided into sections, each about the right size for a lesson, and each a unity in itself, though linked to what has gone before and to what is to come, so that the total effect takes shape gradually through an organization of memories and recurring features. When the work can be adequately dealt with in one lesson, the presentation of it as a whole should take the form of a reading right through without interruptions or explanations. This should be done at the outset with as little introduction as possible. Information about the author is irrelevant: we are not studying his biography; and the place of the work in his total output or in literary history is equally irrelevant. What we were about to present is the work itself, to be judged on its own merits and to be assimilated into our pupils' literary experience. All else can come, if at all, afterwards—must come afterwards, if our pupils are to take it at its true value. Nothing should be allowed to interpose between the student and the work he is meeting for the first time. The most that can be admitted is very occasionally a rapid, unobtrusive setting of the scene, a swift calling up of the right association. Browning's *My Last Duchess* has the sub-title 'Ferrara 1600'. By drawing attention to this we may set the following monologue in one of the small courts of the Italian Renaissance; —but the setting can be evoked in a moment, if at all, and, if it cannot, a history of the later Renaissance had better wait for another kind of lesson. It is nearly always both possible and wise to plunge right into the work; very often it is absolutely essential to do so.

The first reading is extremely important. In it the work makes its first impact. Much may remain obscure, but the mood and the main outlines of the structure should become apparent, and a desire for closer acquaintance with the work should be awakened. The nature of the first reading is therefore worth a good deal of thought by the teacher.

The governing factors are obviously the way the work is intended to make its appeal and the capacity of the pupils to cope with it. If it offers little difficulty to them, and if its qualities as sound are relatively unimportant, the quickest method of presenting it is probably to ask the pupils to read it silently for themselves, or to read it before coming to the class. However, most works gain by being translated into actual speech, and with poetry the sound is

an essential element in the total effect. A good reader acts as interpreter in much the same way as the actors in a broadcast play create characters talking together from the bare framework of the author's text. The technique of effective reading aloud is part of the equipment of any teacher of literature. It need scarcely be added that, if the first presentation of a work is to be through reading it aloud, the teacher must read it. Even he should never do it without careful preparation. The pupils do not yet know the work, and at no time should they be asked to read aloud anything they have not had a chance of preparing. At the end of the lesson, after they have studied the work, some of them may be given an opportunity of reading it to the rest of the class, but care must be taken to choose good readers who will do it justice. It is a bad habit to use literature lessons for reading practice. The literature lesson aims at introducing new literature and illuminating obscurities or clearing away obstacles to its full appreciation. Reading practice is a separate activity and can most satisfactorily be pursued with known material. Only the best interpretation is good enough for literature.

Younger pupils are often set to learn poetry. If they like to memorize it, they should be encouraged to perform it from time to time. Learning by rote and mumbling through verse to check the accuracy of the memory is the surest way of killing any fondness for poetry and any ability to appreciate as poetry what has been memorized. The point of memorizing is to get rid of the printed text and be able to concentrate on interpretation. Reading prepared material can go a long way towards that. Many teachers find it useful to mark their texts to guide them in reading. Certainly in all reading aloud the emphasis should be on interpretation, and neither teacher nor pupils should attempt it without preliminary study of the work to be interpreted.

Some literature can profitably be studied by means of discussion of the speech represented in it, leading to a good reading aloud by the students. Drama can be 'produced', the interactions of the characters and the situations being directed to a vivid interpretation of the 'lines'. There will not usually be time to carry the production as far as acting of even the most elementary sort, but a good reading can be reached. Passages of dialogue in narrative prose and verse can often be similarly treated. A long novel can be covered by reading aloud and discussion of passages essential to the theme, prepared reading in parts of some of the dialogue, and individual reading of the intervening sections outside the class.

An effective reading is sometimes all a work needs. The teacher who knows his class will sense whether the right effect has been

produced. If it has, then the work had better be left. Tedious discussion will only break the spell and bore the class. Closer acquaintance with the work can be gained by reverting to it on another occasion. A class should build up its own repertoire, from which it selects items for pleasure. The prospect of performance from time to time will stimulate reading practice and memorization of works and portions of works previously presented or studied.

Perhaps the majority of works the teacher decides to take himself with his class, however, will require closer examination after they have first been presented. They will have to be discussed, so that the pupils can assimilate them. The usual method of starting the discussion and keeping it going is for the teacher to ask a few questions. These are teaching questions, not testing questions. The teacher does not primarily want the answers: he wants to guide and control the class's examination of the text. The answers, found in the text, have to be woven into a pattern that unfolds for the class the central theme of the work. Only such questions as contribute to the unfolding of that pattern are relevant. There is no need to exhaust every detail of the work or shed beams of light on every mysterious corner. On the other hand, any minute detail is worth examining if it helps towards the total impression. The examination of the text will not necessarily be a running through in the order in which the sentences stand on the printed page: it is more likely to start with a general quality or impression which gains sharpness of outline by closer examination of details that convey it to the reader. Care must be taken that the discussion keeps strictly to the organization of detail in the actual work. Reference to the external world is unavoidable, but the writer's sensations, which might be guessed from other people's in similar circumstances, are not the objective: what is being studied is the organization of a particular stretch of speech. The words and sentence patterns inevitably communicate by associations from other contexts, but they have to be understood in the particular context with which we are concerned. In Wordsworth's sonnet 'On Westminster Bridge' the usual meanings of 'touching' and 'majesty' have to be known, but the important point is that words found normally in different contexts are brought together without incongruity to describe 'a sight so touching in its majesty'. The reconciliation, as well as the widely separated fields, of the two words has to be felt, and it has implications, not to be missed, for the central emphasis of the sonnet. Again, in Shakespeare's couplet,

> When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
> I summon up remembrance of things past;

we have to recognize the phraseology of the law court, but we

have also to realize how its peremptoriness, indicating the effort of memory, is softened by 'sweet silent thought'. Meanings of words, pictorial and emotional effects, metre and rhythm—in isolation all are dead; only in mutual relationship and controlled by a central purpose are they significant. It is with relationships, patterns, impressions gradually formed from details hardly noticed by themselves, that the teacher is concerned. They need not all be explained, but by a prepared progress through them, adjusting the pace to the pupils' rate of discovery from the text, the teacher can see the total impression of the work getting clearer and clearer to the eyes of the class. When it is reasonably clear and before the interest of exploration has begun to flag, is the time to draw discussion to a close and bring back the whole with a full reading, by members of the class, if they are capable of it, and either individually or several taking part, according to the nature of the work, or the portion of it chosen for that lesson. This is not just to fix the work in the memory. We begin with a unity, and we end with a unity, because only in the whole do the parts have significance.

These remarks are all generalities, and they are advisedly so. Each literary work is a separate problem; there are no methods of teaching literature that are generally applicable. Whether we read with the eye or with the ear, and whether we penetrate to a fuller understanding by looking first at the situations, or the characters, or the rhythms, or the imagery, depends on the work as it strikes an experienced reader, which the teacher may be assumed to be. The principles common to all literature lessons are few but imperative; the methods of applying them as varied as the modes of literature itself. Indeed, one final principle can confidently be added to the few already suggested. If our literature lessons are falling into a regular pattern, there must be something wrong with our teaching. The ways we read and the ways we discuss various works must differ widely to be true to the individual characters of the works themselves.

Spoken English *in the* Gold Coast

PETER STREVENS

ONE OF THE many interesting facts about life in the Gold Coast is that the official language of the country is the mother-tongue of only a minute fraction of the population. The official language, English, is learned at school as a second or foreign language. In addition, there is no one single local language in general use. Five main languages are spoken, four in the South, one in the North, but there are also dozens of communities who speak their own language or dialect and who may in some cases have linguistic affinities with no other community. None of these languages, of course, is related to any European language. From the point of view of the learner of English this means that the language to be learned presents none of the broad and generally systematic resemblances to his mother-tongue that the English person, for example, finds on learning French, or German, or Greek, or Portuguese. The vast majority of teachers come from the South, and are therefore speakers of one or other of the four main Southern languages, Twi, Fante, Ga and Ewe. Consequently, although many teachers have a common language with their pupils, a fair number of teachers find themselves trying to teach English to children with whom they can communicate only through an African language which is already, to the teacher, a second language. I have seen a class in the Northern Territories, for example, listening to a Twi-speaking teacher struggling to explain in Dagbane the difference between 'he goes to school' and 'he is going to school'.

The great majority of school-children leave at the end of their elementary schooling. Only a small proportion reach a secondary school. In other words, the form of English most commonly heard in the Gold Coast is spoken by people for whom it is a second (or even third or fourth) language, studied often under fundamentally adverse conditions up to the level of Standard VI or VII. This type of English contains many characteristic features. It is, in fact, a dialect of English in which the usage in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation differs considerably from 'Standard English'; my concern is purely with pronunciation.

Gold Coast Pronunciation of English (G.C.P. for short) has five main characteristics. First, almost all the sounds used are transferred directly from the local languages. Secondly, many sounds and features which occur in most other English dialects are absent from

G.C.P., because they do not occur in the indigenous languages of the Gold Coast. Thirdly, the characteristic English system of stress is absent, and in consequence, the rhythm of English is also lacking. Fourthly, there is no system of intonation. Fifthly, G.C.P. abounds in spelling pronunciations.

The transference of the sounds of one's mother-tongue into a foreign language is not surprising. English people are notorious for this, as any Frenchman will tell you, who has heard an Englishman's pronunciation of French. The substitution of what one judges to be the nearest sound from one's own language usually permits the listener to understand one's meaning, even if the exact quality of the sounds is unfamiliar. The indigenous languages of the Gold Coast themselves possess a sufficient number of common features, in terms of vowels, consonants, stress, and tone-systems, for the distinctions between the English pronunciation of, say, a Twi-speaker and an Ewe-speaker to be similar in all but a few minor respects. This aspect, the substitution of sounds, is in fact innocuous as far as the intelligibility of G.C.P. is concerned, except when one sound is substituted for each of two different English sounds. For example, a variety of open central a is used both for æ and ɑ: in G.C.P., in words like 'hat' and 'heart'. This can lead to confusion. The substitution arises from the fact that most of the Gold Coast languages possess only one phoneme in this area, which is midway between the English vowels mentioned.

The absence from G.C.P. of some sounds is also not very serious. Gold Coast languages possess no diphthong similar to that in *day*, but other dialects than G.C.P. manage without this in the same way, namely by substituting a close e sound. There are, however, two features whose absence from G.C.P. on occasion causes difficulties. The first is the absence of a distinction corresponding to the so-called 'long' and 'short' vowels of English. In a dialect where one vowel quality does duty for those of both i: and i another for æ and ɑ: another for ɔ and ɔ: and another for ɷ and u: the absence of a distinction of length brings about a whole series of potential confusions. It is surprising how many hundreds of pairs of common words are distinguished by the pairs of sounds mentioned, and how frequently context fails to make the meaning clear and unambiguous. The second feature is that of distinction between s and z. Gold Coast languages generally are so constructed that words do not end in a consonant (other than a nasal). Further, some of them either do not possess a z sound, or make no distinction between s and z. Here, again, the number of confusions which can arise is surprisingly large. *Course* and *cause* are two examples of words which are particularly frequently confused.

The third characteristic of G.C.P., absence of the English systems of stress and rhythm, is far more serious in terms of intelligibility. It is said that in Tin Pan Alley, when ideas are running low, new tunes are sometimes produced by taking an old tune and altering the rhythm and the position within the bar of the accented beat. When this is done, it appears, the result is so unfamiliar that the public will accept it as something new, at any rate for a short time. The same feeling of originality, or at any rate the absence of familiarity, is experienced when an English word receives stress on a syllable other than the one usually stressed. To hear 'itself instead of it'self, or emba'razment for im'bærəsmənt, produces an effect in which puzzlement, however quickly dissolved, spoils immediate comprehension. In the case of most shorter words, however, the Gold Coast habit is to stress all syllables approximately equally, as is done to a large extent in the local languages. This causes no difficulty in terms of word-stress, but it precludes the use of Weak Forms, and makes impossible any system of 'sentence-stress' as it occurs in other dialects of English. Sentence-stress is a feature whose value is appreciated only when one hears English spoken without it ; then we realize how vitally necessary it is for us to have an indication of the relative importance of words within a sentence, and we realize, also, the extent to which sentence-stress is used in Spoken English to cover or to compensate for loose constructions or grammatical inaccuracies.

The absence of a system of intonation is equally limiting. Gold Coast languages are, of course, tone languages, that is to say, any given syllable of any word has a pitch-level (or change of pitch-level) assigned to it, which must always be maintained relatively to the pitch-levels of other syllables. A sort of intonation operates, in that the general level of the voice, and the total range of pitches, may decrease or increase under certain circumstances, but the basic principle is that each syllable has a pitch-level tied to it. The effect of this on G.C.P. is two-fold. In the first place the conception of what we call 'intonation tunes' is lacking, and therefore we miss a great deal of the information about the attitude of the speaker towards his subject and his audience. Sometimes essential information about the function of an utterance may not be available until the utterance has been completed, and the listener is able to 'look back at it'. In the second place, the habit of translation from the mother-tongue may frequently result in particular English words being given a high tone. The effect of this is often bizarre and generally misleading, since a higher pitch in English intonation patterns frequently indicates that the word concerned is an important one for that particular utterance. The lack of intonation on the usual English

pattern does not necessarily mean lack of intelligibility, but it does greatly increase the sense of doubt which has been engendered by other features mentioned.

The frequency of spelling pronunciations is high. This is only to be expected in a country where the indigenous languages are spelt with an alphabet and an orthography which are to all intents and purposes phonetic. Once a very small number of spelling conventions have been learned, it is possible to make a close approximation to the sounds (but not the tones) of any word in those Gold Coast languages which have been written, simply by looking at the spelling. It is hardly surprising that G.C.P. has different pronunciations for *son* and *sun*, or that the first two vowels in *volcanic* also appear in *volcano*. On the whole, however, spelling pronunciations of words are in the same category as substitutions of sounds: after the initial unfamiliarity the Gold Coast pronunciations are soon learned and tolerated.

At this point, having described the nature of G.C.P. I must admit that the description is made from the point of view of one whose own speech is a variety of Received Pronunciation (R.P.), and that many of the points could be shown to exist in other dialects than that of the Gold Coast. The lack of vowel-length, for example, and the lack of a pair of different vowel-qualities to distinguish *hat* from *heart* are both characteristics of one or more of the dialects spoken in the Northern part of Britain. I am not saying that any of these characteristics is unique, neither am I saying that G.C.P. is undesirable. It has already been my misfortune to discover that in bargaining for fish, or endeavouring to hire a taxi to the nearest town, R.P. is a strong disadvantage and G.C.P. a distinct asset. Gold Coast Pronunciation, in fact, serves the purpose which exists for every regional dialect of identifying members of a community and distinguishing strangers. For this purpose, and for the somewhat restricted needs, in terms of communication, of most members of the community which uses it, G.C.P. is clearly more or less adequate. But unfortunately this pronunciation, which I have defined in terms of the educational level of the majority of the speakers, is likely to be the only pronunciation which a Gold Coast person will acquire, and the question arises whether it would be adequate for someone with a very much higher level of education.

The University College of the Gold Coast faced this problem in respect of its students from its foundation in 1948. Long before the problem had been studied in detail it was realized by the University of London (with which the University College of the Gold Coast is closely bound) that it would be advisable for undergraduates reading for degrees in the Faculty of Arts to be tested in compre-

hension and intelligibility in spoken English. In a University efficient oral communication between student and teacher is of major importance, no matter how good the University library. Accordingly, in 1950 an examination in Phonetics and Oral English was introduced as a compulsory part of the Intermediate Examination. This examination brought with it two fundamental questions. The first was whether G.C.P. was in fact a suitable dialect for Gold Coast Africans of a high level of education.

Now, although English-speaking people from other parts of the world find difficulty in understanding Gold Coast people, Gold Coast people insist that they have no difficulty in understanding each other, when using G.C.P. I accepted this without question for some time, until I began to suspect that in fact misunderstandings, hesitations, and the need for repetition were all considerably more frequent in conversations between speakers of G.C.P. than among educated speakers of major regional dialects of English. In order to investigate this problem further a series of tests were conducted, using recorded lists of monosyllabic words, spoken by speakers of G.C.P. and a speaker of R.P. These recordings were played to audiences of R.P. speakers, and speakers of G.C.P., and the ability of the listeners to identify and write down the words spoken was reduced to a percentage and taken as an indication of the 'intelligibility' of the speech under those conditions. The results were startling, even when allowance is made for shortcomings in the design and execution of the experiment. The average score for all listeners, listening to G.C.P., was 29 per cent. The average score for all listeners, listening to R.P. was 64 per cent. Listening to their own dialect, R.P.-speaking subjects had an average of 86 per cent, while G.C.P.-speaking subjects had an average of only 28 per cent. This kind of experiment is normally used for such purposes as testing telephone and radio equipment, and in order to check on the loss of intelligibility through the equipment used similar tests were conducted by the same speakers in the presence of the subjects. In this case the average of R.P.-speakers listening to R.P. rose to 98 per cent, while the average of G.C.P.-speakers listening to their own dialect rose to 61 per cent, still leaving a significant difference. On this evidence, G.C.P. is a less suitable vehicle for the pronunciation of English than R.P. is, and this is in fact what one would expect from a comparison of the constituent features of G.C.P. with those of R.P. As we have seen, the greatest difference between the two dialects is that R.P. contains many features which have no equivalent in G.C.P. Several of the features are distinctive, that is to say, they have a function in distinguishing meanings.

The effect on intelligibility of the absence of these features is of

two main kinds. In the first place the absence of specific sounds causes words to become more difficult to distinguish, because of a very great increase in the number of homophones. Native speakers of English are generally so aware of homophones that they either avoid them by choice of constructions or exploit them by way of puns. Reduce the sounds of English by only a small number, however, and the number of homophones is increased to the point where they are a noticeable proportion of the total words in an individual's vocabulary. An example may be quoted from the speech of a Fante-speaker. His mother-tongue contains no θ and he has never acquired this sound for use in English. When he said 'Free buses have been received by Cape Coast Town Council' he was misleading his audience, since the meaning he thought he was conveying was '*Three* buses have been received by Cape Coast Town Council'. The effect on intelligibility can be put in another way. It is possible to regard speech as a series of coded messages. The 'code' consists of a certain number of sounds for any given language, and it is the sequence and distribution of these sounds which determines the message. Let us imagine a language containing forty separate items in its code. If we make use of only thirty sounds, instead of forty, then information theory tells us that the total amount of information conveyed by each sound will be less. This is obvious enough if we reduce it to absurdity, since clearly a language possessing only one sound could possess only one word of the type that we are accustomed to and the amount of information conveyed would be very small. The point about G.C.P. is that the absence of particular sounds and features greatly increases the number of cases where different 'meanings' cannot be discriminated by ear. In the second place, the absence of features such as rhythm, sentence-stress and intonation involve a loss of 'non-lexical' information, by which the attitude of the speaker towards his audience and towards the content of his utterances are normally conveyed.

The sum of these disadvantages justifies regarding G.C.P. as an unsuitable dialect for use by people of a high level of education.

The second fundamental question now arose: which dialect should be taught? For the reasons mentioned by David Abercrombie in a recent article in *English Language Teaching*[1], the choice was not automatic. Other dialects than R.P. have their claim. But the problem was approached by considering the speech of educated people from English-speaking areas outside Great Britain, in order to see what was the nature of the speech of people in a similar situation to our own graduates.

The most important observation seemed to be that there do exist

[1] *English Language Teaching*, Vol. VII, No. 4 (1953).

'Educated West Indian', 'Educated New Zealand', 'Educated South African', 'Educated Indian' and other comparable pronunciations. Each of these is characteristic and immediately identifiable. Furthermore, these pronunciations seem to bear a fairly close relation to the pronunciations of people less highly educated, but with one important difference: whereas the normal regional pronunciations are in many cases mutually unintelligible, the educated versions seem to be capable of being understood with very little difficulty by educated speakers from other areas.

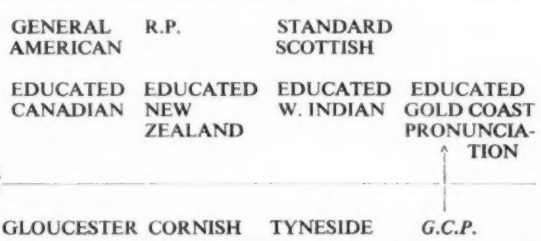
This seemed not unconnected with observations of the speech of Gold Coast people returning from courses of higher education in England. It is commonly found that individuals who left the Gold Coast as speakers of G.C.P. return to it with a form of speech modified in such a way as to make it much more easily intelligible, at any rate to R.P. speakers. A rough analysis shows that the modifications most frequently found are these : the acquisition of the main features of English intonation as found in R.P.; the acquisition of a system of sentence-stress, and consequently a form of speech-rhythm not completely unlike that of R.P.; the acquisition of distinctions of vowel-length. The resulting product seemed to possess both of the attributes noted in the case of educated people from other areas; it was at once identifiable, by Gold Coast people, as being a pronunciation from the Gold Coast, and at the same time it was mutually intelligible with other 'educated pronunciations'. (I take it that there is no need to labour a defence of the insistence upon education as a linguistic factor: by the nature of the changes which his education brings about a person at a higher level of education necessarily finds that his needs for communication are very much greater and cover a much wider field than they did previously.)

From this point it was possible to decide what the most appropriate course for Gold Coast students would be. Clearly there was no reason for attempting to impose an external dialect, however wide its intelligibility might be said to be, in a country with its own tradition of speech. Equally clearly a form of 'Educated Gold Coast Pronunciation' seemed to be the goal to aim at. The problem remaining was simply how to achieve this. In theory one can teach any dialect of any language, but in this particular case it is debatable whether the dialect yet exists, since the total number of speakers of modified G.C.P. is still extremely small. At all events, even if it does exist, it has been insufficiently analysed and described for a course to be devised on the basis of its characteristics. Eventually, no doubt, something along those lines will be done, but in the meantime it is necessary to 'aim' the course somewhat differently.

The technique finally adopted is to teach and to use as a model a dialect which contains most, if not all, of the various features and distinctions used in English, and which is regarded as being widely intelligible, but in practical work not to expect perfection. The model chosen is in fact R.P., not because other dialects necessarily have a lesser claim in theory, but because R.P. has been so fully described in the technical literature, and because the majority of the staff of the Phonetics Department of the University College was better equipped to teach R.P. than any other specific dialect.

This somewhat arbitrary method has given quite good results in practice, and certainly seems to produce an overall increase in intelligibility among the majority of those students in whom this was a problem at the time of their admission. The main difficulties encountered have been two, one doctrinal and one practical. It is hardly surprising in a country where progress from complete Colonial dependence to thriving nationhood is taking place as rapidly as it is in the Gold Coast, that hostility should sometimes be expressed (or felt, but not expressed, which is more difficult to deal with) against the use of a model of pronunciation which is felt to be foreign. It is not that R.P. is felt to be any more foreign than Scottish or American; they are all foreign to the Gold Coast. In pointing out the irrelevance of this and dispelling the antagonism it has been necessary to be completely frank and to say outright that in my view R.P. is not a suitable pronunciation for adoption by the Gold Coast, and that the considerations governing the choice of model are concerned solely with intelligibility. It is then helpful to play gramophone records of other English dialects, and to ask for opinions on the suitability of, say, Gloucestershire or Tyneside dialect pronunciations, from the standpoint of intelligibility. Examples of Educated New Zealand, Canadian, West Indian, South African and Gold Coast can be found among the teaching staff of the College. These are referred to, and immediately the point is taken that these people speak dialects which are perceptibly different from one another, but are all intelligible to one another. The rough diagrammatic representation on the next page also helps to render acceptable the idea that by aiming at a dialect well above the hypothetical 'level of intelligibility', one may end up with a result of adequate mutual intelligibility with other known regional dialects of educated people.

The practical problem is simply one of numbers. Courses in which instruction along these lines is included in one form or another have to be given annually to around 170 students, even at the present level of the College's student population, and these courses range from Intermediate, through Phonetics as a Special Subject with



English Honours, to a Postgraduate course in Education. To deal with this number of students the Phonetics Department has a staff of three. Obviously, advantage must be taken of every technique which can be used to supplement the teacher. Perhaps the greatest single aid is the tape-recorder. Self-criticism on the part of the students grows much more rapidly when they can hear their own efforts, and can hear them repeated two or three times. It is hoped to supplement this before long with a 'Speech-stretcher', an American device by which gramophone records or tape recordings may be played at half-speed while retaining the frequencies present at the original speed. In addition to these pieces of apparatus the gramophone is used a great deal for the purpose of illustration, while a small portable oscilloscope is being used with apparent success to assist in explaining the fundamental nature of speech. If sounds are classified and demonstrated for this purpose under the system which divides them into musical sounds, noise, and a mixture of the two, even the least technically-minded students appear to find a better understanding of what speech consists of. This complement of equipment is not cheap, but it undoubtedly increases to a very great extent the effectiveness of practical teaching in the face of large classes.

This, then, is a summary of the main problems of teaching the phonetics of English at the University level in the Gold Coast. But when all is said and done it is debatable whether the greatest effect of our courses in the long run may not be felt in the field of African languages, rather than English. There are many burning questions, such as those mentioned by J. Berry in his article in the UNESCO Publication 'African Languages and English in Education', where sensible solutions depend on the replacement of parochialism and prejudice by linguistic understanding and enlightenment. The English phonetics courses follow a syllabus which relates the study of one particular pronunciation of one particular language to modern ideas on language in general. It is to be hoped that this fundamental knowledge will eventually play some part in resolving the vital issues of language which have to be faced in West Africa.

English Teaching *in* Schleswig-Holstein

P. GURREY

ONE VALUABLE result of international understanding and co-operation is that a hard-pressed and often over-worked teacher of modern languages can visit other countries, and can learn much from seeing his counterpart—his 'opposite-number'—handling the same task that he himself faces every day. He can understand and assess the methods that the teacher of modern languages uses; he can perceive the underlying purpose of his procedures and can weigh up their effectiveness. Also he can observe and enjoy the skill and abilities of a fellow craftsman, noting the ways in which he handles problems, difficulties and the pupils' failures, all of which naturally arise in normal teaching. And he can appreciate these methods and procedures and ways of working better than anyone else, for he knows what is involved, and the real difficulties and complexities of the task.

There are, indeed, few modern language teachers who would not benefit from the observation of language teaching abroad. Even if the visiting teacher does not learn any new methods, and he need not expect to do that, he will perhaps see his own methods used skilfully, and will be strengthened in confidence and faith. Or he may see his own methods less expertly handled, and so become more exactly aware of the dangers and weaknesses that he himself may be barely escaping. He may see other methods that are similar to his own, and may perceive more clearly where to sharpen and also concentrate the focus and emphasis in his own teaching; or he may well see where and how to tighten up his own procedures, or to eliminate wasteful and unproductive efforts. Whatever else he may gain from the experience, it is more likely that he will be able to improve his own work, in one way or another, by seeing skilled craftsmen, perhaps master-craftsmen, in his own calling, than he could ever do by critically examining his own teaching habits, manner, procedures and methods.

As success in teaching often turns on practical details of technique, rather than on this method or that, and on *how* a method is handled, it might be much more helpful to describe some actual methods that have been seen in operation, and to comment on their effectiveness and value, instead of discussing method theoretically. So that some lessons that were given this summer in Kiel and Lübeck in secondary schools, where English is the first foreign language, will

be described here as practical examples of certain effective methods. The five lessons selected for this purpose make up a series, ranging from the bottom class to the top class of a school; they were given in two girls' schools to pupils who ranged from average intelligence to far above the average; two of the teachers were in their first year of teaching, and therefore were not fully qualified, as they had yet to take their final teaching examination, consisting of a thesis and practicals.

The first lesson in our series was one to the beginners; these had had five weeks of learning English, with five lessons a week. The average age of the forty-two children in the class was ten or eleven. A large picture had been drawn from one of the pictures in the pupils' first English book; this was pinned on the blackboard. The children had been taught the phonetic script and used only this script in their writing of English; they were about to learn English spelling. If we were to judge from those few who wrote on the blackboard, the children know this script very well, even difficult phonetic spellings, such as that of *daughter*. This lesson was the first that the class had had with a picture, so that the questions that were put to the class by the teacher at first produced a slow response; but that did not matter, and perhaps was a good thing, as it allowed the less observant children to study the picture themselves, without being told all about it by the bright ones. Only English was spoken throughout the lesson, and the questions were determined, naturally, both in content and form, by the picture, so that there was plenty of repetition and ample opportunity of using correct English; and what is so important at first, the form of the questions was restricted: 'Who is . . .?'—'What is he (she, it) doing?'—'How many . . . are there?'. These were well scattered over the class, and usually many children were eager to answer—showing that in previous lessons there had been ample practice, and that earlier teaching had been successful.

As each pupil came out to write on the board, she said aloud what she was doing; necessary corrections were quickly made by other pupils, and obviously most of the class usually knew the correct English. The teacher spoke freely in English, using a simple vocabulary and sentence structure. Words that the children were not likely to have in their active vocabulary were used without explanation or translation; but as the meaning of these was obvious from the context of ordinary classroom procedure or from the situation in the picture, the children could easily understand them. This procedure is thoroughly sound for it helps to enlarge the pupils' passive vocabulary, it trains their ears to become accustomed to respond to tones, rhythms and the sounds of the new language,

and it develops quickness in understanding the language because it promotes the discovery of meaning from verbal and situational contexts.

The lesson was on the approved lines of the Direct Method; and the interest of the children, the correctness of so many of their answers, and the amount of language practised during the period, provided good evidence of the efficiency of the method and the ability of the teacher. Two points particularly indicated the success of the lesson: the first was the gradual increase through the lesson of the number of correct answers, and of the children's ability to find more and more details of interest in the picture. The second point was the speed in questioning, in taking of answers, in correcting and in the use of the board. Quickness in carrying a lesson along is very necessary in nearly all kinds of oral work; but of course it is possible only when the previous tasks have been well learned, when the new material is simple enough for the pupils to make free use of it, and when it is so suited to their interests and intelligence that few difficulties or misunderstandings arise. Speed gives an attractive liveliness to a lesson; cautious or slow-minded or unenergetic language teachers should try to learn to push their questioning ahead and to take answers and to correct quickly when the words, ideas and structures they are using and teaching are easy. In this classroom an eager, friendly atmosphere was evident, and was mainly the result of the teacher's happy and confident temperament, of the children's enjoyment in speaking English so easily and correctly, and to some extent of the humour which appeared here and there, such as: 'How many *ears* can you see in the picture?'—'Six!' was the excited reply; but a few more observant ones, wildly waving their hands, found seven—the seventh in a profile picture of a dog hanging on the wall of the room in the picture!

The lesson in the next class higher up, where the children were at the end of the first year of English, was also a vindication of the Direct Method. The subject was the life cycle of a butterfly—egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, the perfect imago. As new words, and at the same time new ideas for some of the children, were being given to the class, this demanded some skill on the part of the teacher, especially as he used no German throughout, and as many of the children had evidently not realized before how mysterious were the transformations of caterpillar into chrysalis, and chrysalis into butterfly. But by means of quick, rough sketches on the board, of mimed action, e.g. showing the looped walk of the caterpillar and the self-spun silken suspension of the pupa, and the emergence of the butterfly, the children quickly understood the

main facts, and were able to make some use of the new words and ideas. The children's growing realization of the story of the butterfly's life was like the elucidation of a puzzle to them, and this gave them the added delight of finding the solution to a puzzle.

It is not always realized, even sometimes by experienced and skilful teachers, that teaching interesting, non-schoolbook subjects in the new language, even so early in the course, is one of the best ways of making the new language real to the pupils, and of getting new words learned. They are permanently learned because they have been the sole means of conveying new and interesting things to the children—the new words have been met with for the first time in living and vital contexts, and therefore they will not be forgotten, at least not for a long time. No pupil can for ever be interested in 'I am opening the door . . . the window . . . the desk . . . of the classroom'. The teaching of 'other subjects' in a new language is a powerful way of getting the new language used and learned thoroughly. Many teachers have something to learn here.

The next lesson to be seen was with a class that had completed four or five years of English; it was given by a young teacher in her first year of full-time teaching. Without time-wasting preliminaries or general introduction, she said briefly that she was going to tell a story, and afterwards the class had to think of five questions, the answers to which must cover the main points of the story. The story was told—it was about the dyer, who, rather than inform the police, made some thieves dip themselves to the crown of their heads in his blue dye, thus leaving public opinion to punish them. Without any questioning—'to see if they understood the story' (it was obvious that all the class did), the girls began to propose the five questions which would produce the main points of the story. Each proposed question was examined in turn, and written on the board if accepted, or rejected if wide of the mark or unproductive. Then, under the stimulus of the teacher's questioning, the comparative effectiveness of the selected questions was considered. Finally, the ethics of the punishment were discussed, for example: 'Was it a good punishment, or would it have been better to have informed the police?'—'Why was it a good punishment?'

The control and handling of the method, the material and the class were exceptionally good; and the direct, business-like beginning, which got the class to work immediately (without allowing other interests to intervene!) might have been the work of an experienced teacher. The story was a good choice, too, as it had action, humour and a social problem, exactly suited to the age and abilities of the class. The aim of the lesson was, of course, practice in English and the free use of English in oral expression;

but the pupils became so interested in the story and in framing profitable questions that their minds were concerned with facts, with ideas and the logical scope of their questions, instead of language problems, for example, 'Did the question bring to light one point of the story only, or a series of points; was it directed to a minor item or a key fact?'. Thus the pupils had been led into a position in which they were using the language purposively, and not in order to use the correct grammar. Therefore the language practice was not mechanical or artificial—and so there was no 'grammar-book English'. And there was also no self-consciousness about speaking or making mistakes, even though an Englishman was present, and no reluctance or shyness in speaking. The pupils obviously were more concerned in finding the questions than with their own possible failures in expression or in making a good show, or with self-display. In addition to this natural usage of English, there was some direct, though simple, training in logical thinking; for the consideration of each proposed question involved the viewing of the facts of the story in relation to the scope and content of each answer. This directed the training along strictly practical lines, and provided a simple discipline for the minds of the pupils by focusing them on facts that were known and clear to everyone. The directness and economy of the teaching could hardly have been improved upon.

The next lesson was to a class one below the top. The passage from *The Merchant of Venice* beginning 'How sweet the moonlight sleeps . . .' was selected for intensive study. This passage, of course, lends itself to a dryasdust word-study, with learned chat from the teacher about 'patines', 'the music of the spheres', the Orpheus story and the Elizabethan love of music; but this class was to enjoy the magic of poetry, and to taste the sweetness of the poet's mind and thought; for the teacher's evident appreciation of the passage, her lively and well-chosen questions, and the intelligent responsiveness of the pupils kept this intensive study on a high level of appreciative enjoyment and deeper understanding. The class had been well trained to respond to the finer exactness of image, thought and feeling that is to be found only in great literature; and by their close attention to the exact words of the play showed that their minds were being disciplined by the words of the poet, and also stimulated imaginatively to finer perceptiveness and feeling.

It is so easy to make the intensive study of literature an analytic and dull process; but with special care in framing the right questions —and such questions must be determined by the text and by the teacher's own sincere and sensitive appreciation—pupils can be helped to taste more fully the flavour of the language, and to

respond more fully to the images, the thought and the richer associations of the poetry. The words of the poet, dramatist or novelist must, of course, dictate the questions, for instance, 'It says "let the sounds of music Creep in our ears", what, then, must the sounds of this music have been like if they "creep in our ears"?'—'What do we know about the sky when we read that it was "thick inlaid with patines of bright gold"?'—'And what does this tell us about Lorenzo?' When pupils answer questions like these their imaginations have to awaken, and their minds have to become alive to the fine precision of great literature and to its richness of meaning and imagery. Merely to know the plain dictionary meanings of the words is quite insufficient, and compared to the special value of literature far too elementary.

This lesson was an excellent example of how great literature should be studied at the top of a grammar school; there was hardly a question that did not direct the attention of the pupils towards a fuller appreciation, though at one point a discussion of hendiadys deflected the main purpose of the study. It is impossible, without a verbatim report, to indicate how the teacher skilfully redirected imprecise answers, or those diverging from an important issue, towards a more imaginative understanding of the text; though perhaps this brief outline of the lesson may have given some idea of the care, imagination and skill that a teacher must give to this particular kind of intensive study of literature if her pupils are to achieve some of the value that great literature has for us.

The last lesson seen was with the top class of a secondary 'grammar' school; it was of a more searching kind, and it also provided an unusually valuable experience, even for those who were accustomed to observing teaching of high quality. A class of about sixteen girls had been studying Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, and had previously discussed the play from various angles with some thoroughness. Each pupil in turn was then asked to discuss some aspect of the play. There was no hesitation on the part of the girls in dealing clearly, pointedly, and at some length, with such topics as the purpose of the Chorus, the comparative force and subtlety of the temptations, the real nature of the tragedy. The teacher's probing questions, used sparingly, made the pupils think deeply, and sometimes brought them face to face with unexpected facets of their problems. It was evident that the class had been well trained to handle different kinds of topics spontaneously, to meet unexpected problems and to discuss them freely. The high standard achieved under this training could be determined by the skilful way in which the pupils dealt with the various points arising out of the discussions. But what was particu-

larly of interest was the aim and purpose of this training: it was the development of independence of thought, skill in expression, clear thinking, and the fostering of individual judgment. This lesson provided clear evidence that this training was being carried out with unusual skill and tact, and that it was achieving success.

Naturally, these lessons—or most of them—were specially chosen and prepared, for it is right that visitors from another country should see the best that can be offered; but the pupils' responses, and their familiarity with the methods, showed that these lessons were normal and part of normal courses in the schools; they showed too that the kind of training they were providing had been going on for some time. This kind of training is exactly the same as the training in language and literature that one is accustomed to see in the best teaching of English in England; it has the same aims and the same methods. The underlying purpose in all these lessons was to promote pupil activity, to get the pupils to use the language freely and correctly, to interpret texts, and to get ample practice in speaking; but above all there was the constant endeavour to develop independence of mind and personality, and to train the pupils in the skill of right thinking and sound judgment. The main instrument to achieve this was to use the searching question to impel the pupils to get to the main points in the field of thought being dealt with; and then to call on other pupils to add to or improve or develop the answers given. Thus the teachers' objective usually was to encourage the pupils to take the lead in discussion and enquiry—and so to foster their powers of leadership and initiative in intellectual as well as in other fields of experience.

But what encouragement, one may ask, is given by the authorities to this kind of far-seeing and valuable training. The best evidence for this must be the words of the Director of Education for Schleswig-Holstein himself: 'What we aim at is to teach our pupils right ways of thinking. We can promote this thinking in various ways, for instance, we can discuss problems with our pupils, and encourage them to find out ways in which right thinking is promoted; or we can select one aspect or corner of a problem, and teach the pupils how to deal fully with that aspect, so that then they would be able to tackle problems at the other corners of that field of thought or experience; for it is impossible to deal adequately with everything. The main emphasis for the upper school therefore is on *methods* of learning, on modes of thinking, and on ways of getting to the heart of a problem. We try to encourage them to dig deep in a limited field, and to find the underlying ideas. We do not try to teach everything—how unhappy we should be if we knew everything! And it is not enough for our pupils to talk like

waiters; their learning of language must also educate them, should develop their minds and train them to penetrate deeply into the problems of learning, philosophy and of life.'

Sir Stanley Unwin

SIR STANLEY UNWIN, who has been a member of the British Council's Executive Committee since 1935 and Chairman of the Council's Books and Periodicals Advisory Committee since 1936, celebrated on 4th January, 1954, the completion of fifty years in publishing.

English Language Teaching takes pleasure in paying a warm tribute to Sir Stanley for the invaluable services he has rendered to the British Council in general and, through his Chairmanship of the Books and Periodicals Advisory Committee, to *English Language Teaching* during the past six years.

Conversation Groups

H. A. CARTLEDGE

THE AUTHOR of this article recently sat in at two English conversation groups in countries overseas. Each group was composed of married women who could not spare the time for frequent evening classes but who were glad to meet once a week, about tea-time, to practise their spoken English.

One of these groups was in a busy industrial town. Its members were enthusiastic, but ill-grounded in elementary English. The other was on an island, remote from the capital city of the country. Its members had all been away to good schools on the mainland, where English was well taught, and their ability was considerable. There was, however, one point of strong resemblance between the groups. In each case the teacher complained that he had considerable difficulty in getting his pupils to talk.

The first group were obviously tongue-tied through lack of knowledge of English. 'Do you like opera, Mrs. So-and-so?—Yes, I like.' 'What book have you read lately, Mrs Blank?—I didn't read one.' This was the level of most of the conversation, which was more in the nature of a dialogue or even a catechism, since no pupil ever ventured a comment off her own bat. An hour of this sort of thing seemed a very long time, and one could sympathize with the teacher when he confessed that he dreaded the weekly conversation hour.

The other group, when they did answer, answered correctly but monosyllabically. 'Have you seen the film of *Hamlet*, Mrs Black?—Yes.' 'How many children have you, Mrs White?—Two.' But this was no more English conversation than what had gone on at the other place. The pupils *appeared* to understand the questions; but the teacher had no proof that Mrs Black had in fact seen *Hamlet*, or that Mrs White didn't mean three children when she said two, unless he happened to be acquainted with her family. In any case the exercise was a dreary business for all concerned. The reason here was that the class simply had nothing to talk about. Their daily life was extremely limited. Three hours at the outside would suffice to exhaust all the topics of ordinary conversation except the weather; and even the weather in those parts is sufficiently equable to offer few surprises. This meant that by the time the academic year had run half its course, neither teacher nor pupils had anything left to say to each other.

Although the reasons for the absence of brisk and profitable conversation were different in the two groups, the fault in each case

was the teacher's, and the remedy in each case was the same. A conversation lesson needs careful preparation. Apart from drills in question and answer, comment phrases[1] and other necessary preparatory exercises, the pupils must be given something to talk about spontaneously. For the ordinary English lesson, aids are available—the English course, the reading text, the dictation passage; but the conversation lesson can rely on none of these if it is to achieve anything approaching free exchange of ideas in English.

Conversation classes can learn something from discussion group techniques. The duty of the leader of a discussion group is to put forward some proposition about which a variety of opinions, all equally reasonable, may be expressed, and to encourage free discussion of it so that all its members go away not only with new ideas about it, but also knowing how and why they have formed these ideas. The teacher of a conversation group should be ready at every meeting to provide some subject likely to arouse different opinions in different pupils. For elementary classes the sort of proposition which is common in impromptu 'stump' debates will do very well. 'It's nice to get up in the morning, but it's nicer to stay in your bed' is an example. It may not last the whole hour, but it gives all the class a chance of saying something within the limits of their probable vocabulary, and with little fear of those involved ideas and tangled phrases which are the teacher's nightmare. If conversation on one topic flags, it should be replaced immediately by another.

'Equal pay for men and women' is a good topic. It has the advantage of stimulating conversation equally well in mixed groups and in those composed of one sex only. Mixed groups have plenty to say on both sides. Groups consisting entirely of men or women will be able to build up a body of argument in support of their case, and even in these groups there is usually somebody ready to put the opposite point of view. If not, the teacher can interpose at suitable moments to do so, and thus keep the ball of conversation rolling. Other subjects which should provoke a lively discussion are 'Have aeroplanes proved more of a blessing or a nuisance to mankind?', 'Is a lie ever justified?', and 'Would you rather go (*or* send your child) to a day school or a boarding school?' None of them demands a wide range of vocabulary, and all of them pose a clear problem on which students can speak simply and directly.

Subjects like 'What do you do for a living?', 'Where did you (*or* will you) go for your summer holidays?' should be avoided. They elicit little more than a succession of monologues, they provoke no

[1] See D. Abercrombie, *Makng Conversation*, in *English Language Teaching*, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (1953).

discussion, and the thoughts of students tend to run ahead of their command of English, so that they flounder in a morass of ideas which they are unable to formulate. The same is true of 'What have you seen at the cinema lately?' Cinema plots are infinitely varied, and often deal with situations and incidents demanding a range of vocabulary which students have not yet reached in their reading. 'Would you rather live in the town or in the country?' is stale. Everybody has had this at school, and is thoroughly tired of it.

The teacher will have to think carefully about the probable response to a given proposition before he decides to use it. 'To travel hopefully is better than to arrive' is difficult. It has floored many an English schoolboy who has been set an essay on it. 'Which came first, the hen or the egg?' would probably be greeted with stony silence. The joke would have to be explained, and a joke which has to be explained is no joke at all.

'Would you rather be born clever or rich?' could provoke a brisk discussion, though some quick-witted student might say at the start: 'If I were clever I'd soon be rich.' If he did, a new topic would be needed straight away, unless the class were able and willing to discuss cleverness on a more philosophical plane. What the teacher must do is try to forecast the possibilities of discussion offered by a topic. If it does not work out as expected he must not be disconcerted, but must be ready with a substitute.

It is sometimes useful to provide cyclostyled copies of a passage of prose on some topic of the kind to be found in *The Times Fourth Leaders* or in collections of light essays in the tradition of Charles Lamb and Robert Lynd. These passages are not to be studied as they would be in a reading lesson. Their purpose is simply to provide a theme for discussion. They should therefore be straightforward, simplified if necessary, so that the argument is quickly understood by the class. Any experienced oral examiner knows how useful a reading passage is in providing a basis for discussion on matters within the candidate's experience, when without such a passage he would be forced back on questions such as 'Where do you come from?', 'How long have you been learning English?', which provide no real opportunity of estimating a student's ability in spoken English.

Here is an extract from an essay on catching trains by Alpha of the Plough (A. G. Gardiner), which will illustrate the method of using such passages for conversation practice:

'I have been catching trains all my life, and all my life I have been afraid I shouldn't catch them. Familiarity with the habits of trains cannot rid me of a secret conviction that their aim is to give me the slip if it can be done. However reliable my watch I cannot avoid doubts as to the reliability of the watch of the

guard or of the station clock or of whatever signal the engine-driver obeys. Moreover I go in dread of the possibilities of delay on the road to the station. There may be a traffic block, the bus may break down, the taxi-driver may be drunk or not know the way and take me round and round the squares—in fact anything may happen, and it is never until I am safely inside that I feel happy.'

There is no need to read the passage aloud. A glance through it will be sufficient to give the students an idea of what it is about. It is simple and direct in style, though not childish, and it deals with a subject within the experience of almost everybody. The phrase 'give me the slip' may need explanation, but nothing else in the piece offers any difficulty. The first question would be: 'What sort of a man would you expect to see if you met the writer of these words? Describe him, his appearance, his manner. What age do you think he is?' A variety of character-sketches is possible, all based on inferences drawn from the text. Next, 'Is he writing seriously or not?' The vein of the piece is obviously humorous exaggeration of a familiar trait of character, and it is interesting to try and identify specific points in the passage which prove this.

Next, one might ask: 'Do you sympathize with his fears? Why? —*or* why not?' 'Have you ever missed a train by being delayed on the way to the station? If so, how did it happen?' 'Do you often travel by train?' Where to?' 'Do you like train travel? If not, what other forms of travel do you prefer and why?' 'What is the most interesting —*or* the most annoying—train journey that you remember making? What made it so?' All these questions have been touched off by the text, but they all relate to personal experience, so that the lesson is much more than a comprehension exercise. The passage has provided a *point de départ*, but no more.

If this principle is applied in the conversation class, the teacher will find that the difficulty of lack of response will be overcome far more easily than if he relies on discussion creating itself out of nothing at all. People very often find little to say to each other beyond a few platitudes, even in their own language, and there is not much hope of their achieving greater fluency in a foreign tongue unless something specific is provided for them to talk about. The teacher will have to search long and carefully for suitable passages, and will have to imagine in advance the sort of discussion which they are likely to provoke, but he will find the effort well worth while.

The Question Box

Conducted by A. S. HORNBY

Questions from readers should be addressed to Mr. A. S. Hornby, c/o *English Language Teaching*, The British Council, 65 Davies Street, London, W.1.

QUESTION.—The Simple Present tense is often used to describe events in novels and plays. Should this tense be used in the classroom when a novel or play is being discussed? How should its use be explained?

ANSWER.—There is no reason why this tense should not be used for giving an outline of a novel or a play. It helps to make the story more real. The sequence of events belongs to the past, it is true, but these events are re-enacted every time the novel is read or the play performed. When *Hamlet* has a revival in the theatre, the events of the play are repeated at every performance. We have, therefore, in our classroom outline of the play, a use of the Present Tense that can be compared with its use in such sentences as 'I come to school by tram every morning'. This explanation, though not wholly satisfying, perhaps, will help your students.

A newspaper description of a traffic accident would be in the Past Tense, and any repetition would be in the same tense. The traffic accident is an isolated event. The events of the play or novel are recreated every time the play is seen or the novel read.

The Present Tense may also be used for question and answer work (e.g. 'Why does Hamlet jump into Ophelia's grave?'), but for this kind of work the Past Tense is equally suitable.

QUESTION.—In some magazines (e.g. *Life*, *Picture Post*) the Simple Present Tense is used in the captions below photographs. (E.g. 'The President greets Mr X at Washington Airport.') In class we are advised to use the Present Continuous Tense for such situations. Please comment on this discrepancy.

ANSWER.—Magazines use the Simple Present Tense in captions to get actuality. This is a sufficient justification for the use of the Tense. If you use such pictures for oral work in the classroom, you should use the Present Continuous Tense. ('Who is the President greeting?') This tense is always suitable when questions are being asked about activities shown in a single illustration or photograph.

QUESTION.—If I put the sentence 'I give my brother a book' into the passive voice, should I use the form 'A book is given my brother

by me', or 'A book is given *to* my brother by me', or 'My brother is given a book by me'?

ANSWER.—You should not put this sentence into the passive voice! In what possible circumstances are these passive constructions (all three of them theoretically possible and correct) likely to be needed? Exercises in conversion from active voice to passive voice should never be used unless the answers read naturally. They will read naturally only when there is the need to make part of the predicate prominent and when the subject of the active voice is vague or unimportant.

If you feel the need to give your pupils exercises of this kind, compose sentences in which the subject (in the active voice) is vague, for example, *they*, *somebody*. 'Somebody has discovered the cause of the accident'—'The cause of the accident has been discovered'. 'They gave Charles the first prize'—'Charles was given the first prize.'

QUESTION.—I have seen numerous examples of the use of *whose* with reference to things and animals: 'The house whose roof is red', 'the table whose leg is broken', 'the pencil whose lead is blue', 'the dog whose tail is short.' I know that *whose* is correct for persons: 'the man whose nose is red.' Is it always correct to use *whose*?

ANSWER.—The relative *whose* is regularly used of things. But all the examples given in the question can be improved by using *with*: 'the house with a red roof', 'the table with a broken leg', 'the dog with a short tail', 'the man with a red nose.' 'The pencil whose lead is blue' is an unnecessarily long description of 'a blue pencil.'

QUESTION.—I recently found this sentence: 'I wonder who it was.' The pronoun *it* here refers to a person. Is this good English?

ANSWER.—In this case it may be correct enough. If we do not know whether the person referred to is a man or a woman, it is natural to use the pronoun *it*. If the speaker knows the sex of the person referred to, he will say 'I wonder who he is' or 'I wonder who she is.' Consider the case of an anxious husband waiting for the doctor or midwife to come to him with news of his newly-born child. 'Is it a boy or a girl?' he asks. What other pronoun *could* he use?

QUESTION.—Which is correct: to put a penny *in* the slot or *into* the slot?

ANSWER.—'Put a penny in the slot' is what we say. The pedants might argue that you put your penny *through* the slot. (It then

operates a lever and falls *into* the coin-box, presumably!) Use 'in the slot' and you will be in accordance with usage.

QUESTION.—What does 'on the run' mean in the newspaper headline 'Mau-Mau on the run'?
ANSWER.—It means 'running away', 'in retreat', 'trying to get away from their pursuers.'

QUESTION.—Is there any difference between 'most people' and 'most of the people'?
ANSWER.—'Most people' is general. 'Most of the people' is restricted. The restriction is indicated by the context: 'most of *these* people', 'most of the people *in the village*', 'most of the people *whom I met*', &c.

QUESTION.—What does 'making good time' mean in the newspaper headline 'Comet airliner making good time on first flight'?
ANSWER.—It means that the airliner is making the journey within the time scheduled for the flight, and is perhaps ahead of schedule. There have been no delays.

QUESTION.—The adverb *too*, meaning 'also', is often placed at the end of a sentence. It is difficult to know which word it refers to. How can the meaning be made clear in these sentences?

(1) I (as well as you) have had sharp pains in my back.
(2) I have had sharp pains (as well as an ache) in my back.
(3) I have had sharp pains in my back (as well as in my legs).

ANSWER.—The first example is simple enough in writing.

I, too, have had pains in my back.

The second example might be made clear by placing *too* after *pains*.

I have had sharp pains, too, in my back.

For the third example it would be necessary to underline the word *back* to make the reference clear.

I've had sharp pains in my *back*, too.

In speech, however, the adverb *too* can have end position in all three examples. The use of the falling tone on the noun that is to be made prominent, and again on *too*, would be adequate.

(1) ˋI've had sharp pains in my back, ˋtoo.
(2) I've had sharp ˋpains in my back, ˋtoo.
(3) I've had sharp pains in my ˋback, ˋtoo.

Book Reviews

THE STORY OF ENGLISH. Mario Pei. 381 pages. *Allen and Unwin.* 21*s.* Language teachers may well find themselves so irritated by a great deal that is in this book as to be blinded to its good qualities. They will recoil from such value-judgments as the 'unrefined, yet miraculously expressive syntax' of Old English, with its 'harsh, rugged' sounds (p. 22), and if they skip towards the end of the book they are not likely to be reassured by the remarkable deduction (p. 345) that 'English as a tongue for English speakers seems here to stay.' They will flinch at the often hackneyed or inappropriate idioms (Chaucer 'ushered in' his age, Pope Gregory 'had fallen in love with the Angles in Rome'). They will balk at dubious statements. *The Ayenbite of Inwyt* is said to be 'more in accord with the popular spirit of the period' than Layamon's *Brut*. By making use of a 'large stock of French words', Chaucer is said thereby to prove 'that English is sufficient unto itself.' Caxton's oft-quoted *egges—eyren* story is falsified by the statement that *eyren* is a 'Northern' form, although the 'goode wyf' who recognized this form but who did not understand *egges* lived 'atte forlond' (Kent). Although the author presses throughout the well-known point that language is always changing, he lets himself go on record (p. 287) as saying that 'the English language today is fairly fixed and stable, its processes of growth, whether originally native or foreign, are fully determined.' Teachers may find it hard to avoid the conclusion that the author is deliberately avoiding difficulties when he blandly says of a topic on which practically no data have been published, 'the difference between spoken and written syntax is so well known that it need not be discussed.' The chagrin at this point is likely to be paralleled when they read a list of slang expressions including *hatchet man*, *punk*, *case the joint*, and have their curiosity thwarted by the declaration that 'none of them requires an explanation or translation.' But perhaps the most serious general criticism will be that the book is undeniably padded and distended by reason of the author's habit of anticipating or repeating in one chapter arguments and data which are treated more fully in another; one has the impression that the book could have been fifty pages shorter without material loss and with considerable stylistic gain. In short, readers can be pardoned if they dismiss the book as a glib piece of journalistic writing, a view likely to be reinforced by the not infrequent indulgence in what Wolcott Gibbs has characterized as 'Timestyle': 'French are some of the curious terms of square dancing.'

This is unfortunate, because in many ways Professor Pei has followed up his earlier popularizations of linguistic science (*The World's Chief Languages* and *The Story of Language*) with an uncommonly informative account of the growth and character of English. Bold enough to settle on land already well-cropped with such excellent one-volume harvests as those of Bradley, Jespersen, Baugh, Robertson, Mossé, Wrenn and Potter, it is no 'slender sheaf' of gleanings that he has 'led home.' He has illumined the well-known generalizations with a wealth of fascinating illustrations, often from contemporary unwritten sources, and has turned the kaleidoscope of our language round and round to reveal rarely contemplated patterns.

The book has three parts, relating to the past, present and future of English. The first is a lively and attractive treatment of the familiar story, and although little new can be expected in less than 150 pages, Pei in fact manages to find the more interesting and amusing data to illustrate his points. In the entertaining chapter on Names, for example, we are told that a man called 'Breach Loading Cannon' fought in the Revolution, and 'Genuine English Tweed' at the Battle of New Orleans, and that a St Louis physician 'has the appropriate name of Dr Safety R. First.' It is not always easy, of course, to say of some of Pei's brighter examples just what lesson they are supposed to inculcate, unless perhaps it be that truth (which we must suppose them to represent) is stranger than fiction; but it is good that so much of the interesting lore of our language finds a place in the story of English.

The part dealing with the present begins with an account of the current regional differences in English. Parts of this chapter are misleading; the reviewer is not aware, for instance, that in Britain a 'hidden driveway' is called a 'lay-by' or that a 'bobbie-soxer' is called a 'hankie-hatter'; and if it is true that we refer to a 'bookie' as a 'turf accountant', the reverse is even truer. For the most part Pei is careful to make his material relate to the language of the entire English-speaking world, but it is inevitable that as regards current English he should know more about American than British habits. This makes the material of this whole section of the book, and notably of the chapters on slang and the various jargons, relatively unfamiliar on this side of the Atlantic, and all the more welcome for that. Here again it is the entertaining illustrations that constitute the most striking feature; on the subject of word-substitutions, Pei tells us that before 1880 one said on the phone not *hello* but *ahoy*, and asks, 'How many know that the adjunct to feminine beauty known today as *falsies* existed a century ago, but under the name of *palpitators*?' How many indeed!

The third part, *The Future*, is the least successful part of the book, repeating much already stated in preceding chapters (for example, on the international character of English), and indulging in a number of not very inspired forecasts. It is chiefly remarkable for the determined stand that is made for spelling reform. Elsewhere, Pei is noticeably shy about committing himself to any view over which he suspects there may be scholarly controversy, but in his chapter on our spelling anomalies (in which he adds to our stock by referring to Dr Follick as 'Mont Fosdick') he argues single-mindedly for 'phonetization'. In a later chapter he seems to favour likewise some kind of 'speaking reform', and one remarkable reason is worth quoting: 'there would be a peculiar charm about an English language spoken as it is written, as, say, an Italian who has learned it out of a grammar pronounces it, or as an Anglo-Saxon would probably pronounce it if he came back to life.' Yet in this last section of the book too there is much attractive food for thought, as when the author ponders on contemporary attitudes to 'good usage': 'Rejection of authority in the field of language may conceivably lead to rejection of authority in other fields, where the issue is not one of fashion . . . but of cold facts and figures. . . . Language unconsciously colors all our thinking, and a devil-may-care attitude in matters linguistic is bound to be reflected elsewhere.'

Here, then, is a book on the whole interestingly written and containing a great deal of curious miscellanea not elsewhere (to the reviewer's knowledge) available in a single, modestly-priced volume. For reasons which have probably emerged, it is not a book to be recommended to young students—at least without careful remedial action—though for advanced students and above all for teachers and lecturers it should provide rewarding reading.

CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH. W. J. Ball. 284 pages. *Longmans Green.* 7*s.* 6*d.*

A writer to *The Times* a few months ago reported that throughout 80,000 miles of travel extending over 20 months he had found people of many countries speaking English well, and anxious to speak it better. In the East, he declared, that was a widespread belief that English as heard in BBC broadcasts was the standard that serious students of English should seek to attain. But listeners were again and again puzzled by certain expressions. The writer quoted two of these: 'You've got something there' and 'I couldn't care less'.

Mr Ball has had long experience of teaching English, and of supervising the teaching of English, in Europe. Like the writer to *The Times*, he has realized that there are thousands of students

whose knowledge of English, as English is found in books, is excellent, but whose knowledge of colloquial English is imperfect. It is not merely a question of unfamiliarity with current slang or the fashionable clichés. Many students of English have reached the level at which they can successfully carry on a conversation with English people. But if by chance they are in a position to 'listen in' to a group of English people talking among themselves, these students are at a loss. It is not the speed of utterance that baffles them. They have come up against problems of conversational idiom, in both vocabulary and syntax, for which their previous studies have left them unprepared.

It is in an attempt to remedy this deficiency in the usual type of language course that Mr Ball has written this book. It is an ambitious attempt and was certainly worth making. We do not need to understand every conversation we may happen to overhear, but with the development of international broadcasting we do find it useful to be able to follow a colloquial discussion. The student of English abroad need not worry if he fails to understand the jokes of a Cockney or Lancashire comedian in a programme of the General Overseas Service, intended mainly for British expatriates. He may, however, be very much interested in discussions on social, economic or political problems. Such discussions, if unscripted, are likely to be in the conversational idiom that he finds baffling.

Mr Ball's book is intended for advanced students of English who want to speak English idiomatically. It will help non-British teachers who want to give lessons in spoken English. It will also help those who, although they seldom have occasion to speak English, enjoy reading modern English fiction and drama, and would prefer to follow the spoken dialogue of an English film instead of being distracted by the translated captions on the screen.

The book has two parts. Part One analyses the differences between written and spoken English in vocabulary and syntax. It tries to relate the English language to the character of the people of England. These are difficult tasks, and although the author has put together a vast and entertaining collection of material, the reader will probably be left with a feeling of frustration. His difficulties are both added to and lightened. The sections dealing with syntax are likely to prove more helpful than those dealing with vocabulary, and Chapter Five, headed 'A Practical Approach to Conversation' is really practical.

Part Two consists of (A) a series of test papers and (B) continuous passages of English dialogue from novels and plays, each with notes or comments and questions.

The test papers require both knowledge and imagination. To replace *imitate* by *take off* in a sentence requires merely familiarity with idiom; to supply a context in which such phrases as 'And high time, too', 'all being well' and 'as a matter of fact' requires imagination, and there seems likely to be quite a lot of time-wasting here. It is useful for the advanced student to know the meaning of 'call it a day' or 'go off the deep end', but hardly necessary for him to be able to produce them, even when the appropriate situation presents itself. If this is true of good colloquialisms, it is even more true of slang. Sir Harold Nicolson has an entertaining essay, 'On Learning Foreign Languages' (in *Peoples and Things*, 1931) in which he makes some witty and profound observations. 'No very great linguistic proficiency is required to understand and read everything and to be able to say what you wish in such a manner as to be easily and quickly understood. To reach a higher standard than that takes several years, and the surplus which is thereby gained is of little practical utility. It ministers merely to your vanity, and you end by becoming a querulous and embittered charlatan.'

Many people have an instinctive prejudice against the perfect linguist. They feel that he is a kind of gate-crasher. If his perfection extends to slang, that is worse still, for as the winner of a *New Statesman* competition wrote:

The chief use of slang
Is to show that you're one of the gang.
When it dates,
It grates.

Teachers who use this book should bear in mind the dividing line between that part of a language of which a recognition knowledge is enough and that part of which the ability to reproduce is needed. They will find in this book a valuable collection of material, but material to be used judiciously. The author himself gives a warning about the inadvisability of using the Cockney rhyming slang illustrated on page 123. The well-known Radio Doctor who used to broadcast on Fridays was fond of this. He talked of caring for your 'plates of meat' (your *feet*) during walking tours. This may have pleased some of his listeners, but on most, probably, it grated.

This book deserves careful examination by teachers of conversation. They will find much to help them. It should be particularly useful at Summer Schools. But discrimination is important. There is much more here than even the advanced student needs to use.

Other Books Received

THE ENGLISH COURSE. M. Eyden and E. Potter. *Allman and Sons.* Book 1, 3*s.* 9*d.*; Book 2, 4*s.*; Book 3, 4*s.*; Book 4, 4*s.* 3*d.*
A series of books for pupils aged 11–15 in English Secondary Schools. Each book contains 30 lessons, consisting of passages from English literature followed by exercises.

JUNIOR COMPREHENSION. E. E. Allen and A. T. Mason. Books 1-3. *Edward Arnold.* 2*s.* 9*d.*
A series of books for children aged 11–14 in English Grammar Schools.

SELF-HELP ENGLISH. R. Ridout. Book 4. 128 pages. *Macmillan.* 3*s.* 9*d.*
Book 4 concludes this course for English Secondary Schools.

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES IN COMPREHENSION AND EXPRESSION. C. C. Harris. 88 pages. *Longmans Green.* 3*s.*
A book for the lower classes of English Secondary Schools.

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